

Herbs

This week's recipes

This week, James Wong explores how herbs can be used to help treat a range of minor everyday ailments.

Using lemon balm, he creates a lip salve which might help when cold sores strike. He also shows how plantain leaves can be used to make a cream to help soothe insect bites and stings.

For those keen to have fresh breath, James shows how to make a spray using thyme. And for a beauty treat, he uses peppermint and other common garden herbs to whip up a fragrant homemade body scrub.

These recipes are taken from the book 'Grow Your Own Drugs', published by HarperCollins.

Lemon balm lip salve for cold sores

21 tbsp (approx. 50 g) fresh lemon balm leaves 1 tbsp wheatgerm oil 1 ml olive oil 1 tbsp honey 1 tbsp beeswax 1 drop tea tree oil

1. Wash and strip the lemon balm leaves and chop finely. In a pan over a slow heat, stir and crush one third of the lemon balm leaves with the wheatgerm and olive oil for 10 minutes, or until it starts to bubble. Take off the heat and leave to infuse for 10 minutes.
2. Strain the oil through a muslin-lined sieve or colander into a bowl, squeezing the leaves to get out all remaining juice. Throw away the squeezed leaves.
3. Repeat this process twice more with the remaining 2 batches of lemon balm leaves, using the same oil.
4. Place the oil in the pan on a gentle heat and add the honey and beeswax. Stir until melted, then take off the heat and stir in the tea tree oil.
5. Pour the salve into small sterilized jars, where it will set solid within 10 minutes.

USE: Apply to cold sores whenever needed.

STORAGE Keeps for up to 1 year.

Plantain cream for bites and stings

4 tbsp fresh chopped plantain leaves 1 ml boiling water 1 tbsp olive oil or sunflower oil 1 tbsp almond oil 1 tsp beeswax 1 tsp emulsifying wax 1 tsp glycerine 1 tsp vitamin C powder

1. Wash and chop the plantain leaves. Divide into two - put one half in a bowl and the other half in a pan. Cover the plantain in the bowl with the water and leave to infuse for 10 minutes.
2. In the pan, add the olive (or sunflower) and almond oils to the plantain and heat gently to simmering point. Don't allow to boil - if it starts boiling, take off the heat immediately. Once at simmering point, remove from the heat and leave for 10 minutes to cool.
3. Drain the infusion, taking out the plantain leaves. Set the liquid to one side.

4. Drain the infused oil into another pan, extracting the plantain leaves. Heat the oil again. Add the beeswax and emulsifying wax and melt, stirring - you are aiming for a foamy consistency.
5. Add 16 tbsp infused water to the pan and whisk to achieve a consistency like salad dressing. Add the glycerine and vitamin C powder.
6. Pour into sterilized glass pots and seal.

USE: Apply to affected area as often as needed.

STORAGE: Keeps for 3 months in the refrigerator in an airtight container.

Thyme breath spray

10 tbsp (approx. 25 g) fresh thyme leaves 1 tsp (approx. 30 g) fresh mint leaves 1 fresh eucalyptus leaves 1 tsp aniseed 1 tsp cloves 1 ml vodka Rind of 1 lemon 1 tsp artificial sweetener to taste, if desired 1 tsp glycerine

1. Strip the thyme, mint and eucalyptus leaves from their stems and chop. Place in a blender and whiz. Add the aniseed and cloves to the blender and whiz again.
2. Place in a dark bottle with the vodka, lemon and artificial sweetener (if using) and leave for 10 days to 1 month to macerate.
3. Strain through muslin. Add the glycerine, then stir and pour into a 50 ml spray bottle (with a yield of up to 1 ml per spray).

USE: Spray 1 ml into the mouth when needed

NB This contains alcohol, so be careful not to overuse, especially if driving.

STORAGE Keeps for up to 1 year.

Herbal body scrub

50 g fresh mint leaves, finely chopped 50 g fresh eucalyptus leaves, finely chopped 50 g fresh rosemary leaves, finely chopped 1 tsp freshly ground black pepper Peel of 2 lemons 1 ml olive oil 1 g sea salt (fine-grained) 1 tsp vitamin C powder Extra eucalyptus leaves and slices of lemon peel, to decorate

1. Place the chopped herbs, black pepper and lemon peel in a pan, then add the olive oil. Place on a medium heat and stir, then leave for 2 minutes with the lid on. Place the paste in a piece of muslin over a sieve and squeeze out all the oil into a bowl below.
2. Mix the sea salt and vitamin C powder in a bowl. Add most of the oil (reserving a little to seal the jar) and stir well. Place the mixture in a sterilized Kilner jar and press down well. Decorate the top with a few eucalyptus leaves and slices of lemon rind. Pour a layer of the remaining oil on top of the salt scrub to keep it airtight.

USE: Apply to wet skin in the bath or shower, when needed. Scrub, then rinse off well with warm water.

STORAGE: Keeps for 6 months, or 1 year in the refrigerator.

